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Lawmaker Seeks to Ban Plastic Pistols

We stirred up a tempest of alarm, denial and malicious innuendo when we reported recently that Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, the terrorists' friend, was dickering to buy a quantity of Austrian-made, semi-plastic pistols that are difficult or impossible for airport security measures to detect.

The pistol is the Glock 17, invented by an Austrian, Gaston Glock, and manufactured at a plant outside Vienna. Our intelligence sources told us Qaddafi was trying to buy 100 to 300 of the handguns.

We also reported that a Pentagon security expert had succeeded twice in carrying a dismantled Glock 17 through the human and mechanical weapons detectors at Washington's National Airport.

After our January report, Glock and the Austrian government began issuing refutations in press releases and telegrams to major publications. Their concern was presumably heightened by the fact that Glock is attempting to market the pistol in the United States.

One Pentagon spokesman told a journalist that he doubted the existence of the "Pentagon security expert" we said had tested the Glock 17 against airport security. For the record: The man who conducted the unofficial test is the Pentagon's top expert on counterterrorism, Noel Koch, the principal deputy assistant defense secretary.

Glock said tests under the supervision of unnamed "official security specialists" showed clearly that "both scanners and detectors can identify the Glock 17," which has a mass that is 83 percent steel and only 17 percent plastic.

The point, of course, is that the metal parts, which are detectable, don't look like gun parts, while the plastic parts, which do look like a gun, escape detection. Koch proved this twice with a dismantled Glock 17.

In fact, Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-N.Y.) settled the matter beyond any nitpicking. One of his aides hand-carried the most recognizable part of a Glock 17—its plastic, pistol-shaped frame—through a Capitol Hill metal detector without having it spotted. The rest of the pistol's parts, mostly metal, were in his briefcase and went through the scanner without being identified.

Meanwhile, both the Federal Aviation Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms suddenly decided the problem of plastic handguns deserved attention. The aviation agency has since learned of a U.S.-made, all-plastic pistol, which is not yet on the market but which would be undetectable by a metal-scanning device.

Biaggi has introduced a bill that would require federal security testing of all non-metal firearms, whether imported or made in the United States. If a weapon failed to be detected by standard scanning equipment, it would be outlawed, with a few minor exceptions.

Footnote: Glock told us he has never sold his pistols to Libya, and has no ongoing negotiations to do so. But other sources told us that, without Glock's knowledge, Qaddafi was trying to buy the guns through intermediaries in Austria. It would be interesting to know if the salesmen have told Qaddafi about Glock's claim that the pistol is easily detectable by airport security scanners.